Recognizing and Supporting Commercially Sexually Exploited Youth: A Guide for Educators

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Overview

• Defining CSEC/CSEY
• CSEY & Schools
• Beyond Definitions: Identifying and Intervening
• Q&A
Defining CSEC/CSEY
Defining CSEC/CSEY

- CSEC/CSEY stands for commercially sexually exploited children or youth.
- Defining can CSEC/CSEY be very difficult due to differences between legal definitions and the experiences of youth.
Legal Definitions: Federal Trafficking Victims Protection Act

- The Trafficking Victims Protection Act of 2000 (TVPA) defines “severe forms of trafficking in persons” as:
  - **SEX TRAFFICKING:** “The recruitment, harboring, transportation, provision, or obtaining of a person for the purpose of a commercial sex act, in which the commercial sex act is induced by force, fraud, or coercion or in which the person induced to perform such act has not attained 18 years of age.”
  - **COMMERCIALY SEXUALLY EXPLOITED CHILDREN (CSEC):** Any child under the age of 18 that has been induced to perform a commercial sex act (regardless of whether force, fraud or coercion can be proven).
  - A **COMMERCIAL SEX ACT** is defined as any sex act on account of which anything of value is given to or received by any person.
Legal Definitions: California Trafficking Victims Protection Act

- Passed in 2005 (AB22).
- Established human trafficking as a felony crime in California and covered criminal prosecution, victim protection and prevention efforts.
- Other California trafficking laws:
  - AB1844 (2010)
  - Prop 35 (CASE Act, 2012)
Legal Definitions

- Being induced involves:
  - Recruiting
  - Harboring
  - Transporting
  - Providing
  - Obtaining (or attempting to obtain)
  - Receiving
  - Transferring

- Items of value include:
  - Food
  - Shelter
  - Getting nails/hair done
  - Presents
Challenge Your Assumptions

1. CSEC/CSEY are NOT criminals.
2. CSEC/CSEY have some similarities, but amongst them, there are many differences.
3. There are lots of different reasons why youth are exploited/engage in commercial sexual activity.
4. “Getting out” or stopping engaging in commercial sexual activity are not the sole responsibility of CSEC/CSEY; tackling the issue is about providing support AND addressing individual and systemic factors that lead to its occurrence.
Profiles

CSEC/CSEY can come from a variety of backgrounds (shaped by race, class, gender expression).

There are some overall trends:

- Predominately female and youth of color
- Backgrounds of trauma
- Age:
  - Ages 13-18, as young as 10 years
  - Average age of entry into the commercial sex industry in the U.S. is 11 years old. (U.S. Department of Justice, Child Exploitation and Obscenity Section)
Vulnerabilities

• Youth generally have had precursors in their lives that have rendered them vulnerable to exploitation and engaging in commercial sexual activity.

• Precursors to trafficking often include trauma, including physical, emotional or sexual abuse as a youth.
How Does Trauma Lead to Exploitation?

- Trauma can take many different forms.
  - **Acute trauma**: a one-time event, like an injury or single instance of sexual assault.
  - **Complex trauma**: ongoing and multiple traumas occurring at the same time. This can look like combinations of ongoing neglect, persistent physical or sexual abuse, or domestic violence.
  - **Other examples** of trauma include community violence, natural disasters, or school violence.
How Does Trauma Lead to Exploitation?

- Trauma has a deep and lasting impacts on youth including:
  - Perceptions of how people treat each other
  - Brain development and emotional regulation
  - Shaping expectations of their own lives
How Does Homelessness Lead to Exploitation?

- Various types of homelessness
- Homelessness can also involve youth leaving a family member’s home or a placement (child welfare or probation).
  - 1/3 youth are approached by an exploiter within 48 hours of leaving home.
- Youth experiencing homelessness can be swayed by an exploiter who promises shelter.
How Do Dislocated Relationships Lead to Exploitation?

- Dislocated relationships include both peer and caregiver disruptions.
- Youth who commercially sexually exploited are often being bullied, bullying, fighting with peers, and having negative peer relationships as younger children.
- This lack of support system renders youth emotionally vulnerable to promises of a caring relationship and support, tactics that exploiters can use.
How Do Mental Health Needs Lead to Exploitation?

• Mental health needs can be both a precursor and an outcome of exploitation.

• Mental health needs include depression, anxiety, bipolar disorder, posttraumatic stress disorder (PTSD), attachment disorder, or substance abuse disorder.

• Mental health needs make a young person more likely to be emotionally swayed.

• The trauma of exploitation can lead to mental health needs.
How Does Structural Oppression Lead to Exploitation?

- Structural forms of oppression include poverty, racism, sexism, homophobia and transphobia (“isms”).
- Poverty renders youth vulnerable to promises of having their basic needs met, including those of money, clothing, and shelter.
- “Isms” within the home or placement can cause a youth to leave or be kicked out, leading to homelessness and housing instability.
- The “isms” can also occur in the systems that are designed to support youth.
Unfulfilled Needs

Being exploited/engaging in commercial sexual activity/being in “the life” fills many needs, including those of:

- Social connection
- Meaning
- Identity
- Basic necessities
  - Food
  - Money
  - Shelter
What Does Exploitation Look Like?

- Internet based***
- Hotels/motels
- Street
- Gang related
- Massage businesses
- Residential brothels
- Hostess and strip clubs
- Escort services
- Truck stops

Youth may present as working “alone” or “on their own” when in reality they are working with an exploiter in a less direct way or engaging in survival sex.
How Does It Happen?

- Through exploiters:
  - Emotional manipulation
    - Façade of a relationship
    - Seemingly caring
    - Provider of basic needs (financial, housing, food, clothing)
  - Physical/sexual force
  - Social influences (i.e. friends, relatives)
  - Coercion (see next slide)
- Cultural glorification
- Survival sex
Exploiters’ Tactics of Coercion and Control

- Threats
- Demonstrating Omnipotence
- Induced debility and exhaustion
- Isolation
- Monopolization of perception
- Degradation
- Enforcing trivial demands
- Occasional Indulgences

Pimp Tactics of Coercion and Control
Why Remain?

- Continued need for basic necessities, identity, social connection, and meaning
- Fear
- Hopelessness
- Paralyzed by abuse
- Trauma bonding
- Perceived independence
Trauma Bonding

- Trauma bonding is also known as Stockholm Syndrome.
- It is a psychological survival and self-preservation tactic.
- Youth develop empathy and positive feelings for their exploiters (often times defending and identifying with exploiters).
- It increases youth people’s chances for survival and potentially fills needs for safety and care.
- It can be hard to overcome and for youth, it is a real connection and relationship.
Educators and CSEY
Impact on Learning Environment

- Disrupts safe learning environment
- Trauma impacts student performance and behaviors
- Areas of overlap
  - Section 504/IEP
  - Discipline
  - Truancy
  - Academic Performance/Credit Deficiency
Identification and Intervention

- Educators may be some of the first people able to identify warning signs
- Might be one of the more structured environments for CSEY
- Opportunities to intervene early and often
  - Referrals to outside support
  - Internal counseling
  - Monitoring
Prevention

- Trafficking happens in your community including in schools
  - On campus
  - Social media
- Train staff and parents to recognize signs of trafficking
- Raise awareness for students to prevent future victimization
- Develop victim-focused, trauma informed practices and procedures
Discipline

- Traffickers may be in your school community
- Schools need to respond
  - Student discipline
  - Employee discipline
Beyond Definitions: Identifying and Intervening
Identification

- Identification can take place in many settings:
  - Child Welfare
    - Upon initial entry into the child welfare system
    - For youth who are already in the child welfare system
  - Law enforcement
    - While on patrol
  - Probation
    - Upon initial entry into probation (screening unit)
    - When already detained in juvenile hall
    - After being released back into the community
  - Mental health providers
  - Medical providers
  - School settings
General Indicators

- Having an older “boyfriend”/“partner”
- Spending significant time with adults
- Conflictual or abusive relationships
- Marked change in attire
- Marked change in mood or behavior, including increased hypervigilance, depression, mood swings, acting out, or volatility
- Keeping late hours
- Leaving home for periods of time
- Secrecy about whereabouts
General Indicators

- Using specific slang
- Possessing unexplained expensive clothing, shoes, technology, etc.
- Possessing multiple cell phones
- Switching phone numbers frequently
- Spending a great deal of time on social media sites, texting, and calling
- Reporting spending time in areas known for sex work
- Lacking identification
- Signs of physical or sexual abuse
- Being consistently tired or hungry
Specific Indicators for Educators

- Histories of trauma and system involvement
- Substance use
- Mental disorders, particularly PTSD, anxiety, depression, bipolar disorder, and attachment disorder
- Students eligible for special education (correlating factor)
Screening vs. Assessment

- Screenings are designed to identify youth as being exploited/engaging in commercial sexual activity.
- Screenings are shorter than assessments.
- For most stakeholders who are identifying, a full assessment is not necessary and may do more harm than good.
- Screening/identification tools will look different in each setting.
- Screening tools must be culturally sensitive and take into account the experiences of different youth.
- Upon identification through screening, stakeholders should make proper referrals.
  - Child welfare
  - Service providers
Examples of Screening Questions

- Did anyone ever pressure you to engage in sexual activity?
- Did anyone ever take photos of you and if so, what did they use them for? Were these photos ever sent to other people or posted online (Craigslist, Backpage, Myspace)?
- Did anyone ever ask/force you to engage in sex with friends or associates for favors/money?
- Did anyone ever ask/force you to engage in commercial sex through online websites, escort services, street prostitution, informal arrangements, brothels, fake massage businesses or strip clubs?
Getting Out: Stages of Change Model

- Precontemplation
- Contemplation
- Action
- Maintenance
- Relapse/Recycling

Flowchart showing the stages of change in getting out.
Getting Out: It’s a Process

- **Precontemplation:** Not yet acknowledging that there is a problem behavior that needs to be changed.
  - When in the precontemplation stage, CSEC may say things like, “My boyfriend loves me and I like supporting him,” or “I don’t want to stop what I’m doing.”

- **Contemplation:** Acknowledging that there is a problem but not yet ready or sure of wanting to make a change.
  - When in the contemplation stage, CSEC may say things like, “I don’t really like some things about this situation,” or “I don’t always like the way I’m treated.”

- **Preparation/Determination:** Getting ready to change.
  - When in the preparation/determination stage, CSEC are making plans to decide to live their lives in a different way. For example, they may commit to staying at a group home, attending school, and taking steps to identify ways they can stay away from their exploiter.
Getting Out: It’s a Process

- **Action:** Changing behavior.
  - When in the action stage, CSEC are enacting the behavior change. For example, they may avoid commercial sexual activity or interacting with their exploiter or may start attending school.

- **Maintenance:** Maintaining the behavior change.
  - When in the maintenance phase, CSEC continue the behavior they were seeking to enact. For example, they may be attending school or avoiding their exploiter.

- **Relapse:** Returning to older behaviors and abandoning the new changes.
  - In the relapse stage, CSEC may return to the behavior they were striving to change. Relapse is a natural part of the process and will likely happen more than once. Given CSEC’s specific trajectories through the stages of change model, other terms may be more appropriate, like the term recycling.
Interventions

- Qualities
  - Trauma informed
  - Safe
  - Accessible
  - Trauma informed
  - Client/Student centered
  - Culturally sensitive

- Interventions to...
  - Meet basic needs
  - Facilitate independent living skills
  - Meet psychological needs
Trauma Informed Practice

- It is necessary to understand how trauma manifests itself in people and how it is triggered.
- Trauma impacts critical thinking and brain development.
- Trauma can make people volatile, hyper vigilant or shut down.
- Many survivors are trying to meet their basic needs (safety, respect, expression of identity) the best way they know how.
- Individuals may not be able to take information with them or get assistance immediately.
- It is about acknowledging how trauma is impacting survivors’ daily lives and impacting their interactions with others, including providers.
- Being trauma-informed means meeting survivors where they are at.
Student Centered/Strength Based Services

- Philosophy
  - Take the lead from youth.
  - Strive not to force opinions or perspectives on them.

- Strategies
  - Actively listen.
  - Ask open ended questions that allow youth to see their various options.
  - Respect their opinions, even if you disagree with them.
  - Ask permission to offer your opinion.
  - Compartmentalize your own beliefs. This situation is about the student, not our thoughts and feelings.
  - Identify what they are doing well to build them up:
    - Ask survivors how they got through tough situations.
    - Highlight skills they used to get through tough situations.
    - Let them know that skills are transferrable to other situations if they want.
Culturally Sensitive Services

- Everyone has different perspectives.
- It is necessary to understand and respect where youth are coming from, treating their experiences as valid, truthful, and meaningful.
- Points of identity are important.
  - Differences include race, gender, age, sexuality, and experiences with trauma or exploitation.
- Expect to make mistakes, but be prepared to acknowledge it, apologize, and make changes in your behavior.
  - Youth are very perceptive and will pick up on this quickly.
- Working to be culturally competent is a lifelong process that does not end.
Safety

- Provide psychoeducation around risks of engaging in commercial sexual activity. Allow space for CSEY to disagree.
- Use a harm reduction approach.
- Have safety plans in place.
Providing for Basic Necessities

- Regularly check in with CSEY regarding the status of their basic needs, including needs for hygiene products, clothing, and transportation.

- Provide support and advocacy around applying for identification, public assistance, filing police reports, completing the terms of their probation (i.e. community service, attending court dates), etc. Attend appointments with CSEY. Thoroughly explain the application processes.
Facilitating Independent Living Skills

- Provide psychoeducation around independent living skills.
- Set boundaries. For example, coach CSEY in leaving voicemail messages or sending texts to actively reach out for support.
- Understand and empathize with, but do not passively accept, disrespectful behavior.
- Problem solve barriers to independent living skills, including issues with anger management and conflict resolution in the context of peers and partners.
- Provide space to practice independent living skills. For example, therapists and case managers can role-play conversations CSEY would have with public assistance workers, probation officers, teachers, etc.
- Support CSEY in developing consequential thinking skills, including the framework of preserving safety and harm reduction.
- Establish and check in about short term and long-term goals.
- Ask CSEY what skills they want to develop and find spaces in which they can develop these skills. For example, if they would like to develop computer skills, connect them with a computer class.
Meeting Psychological Needs

- Take a strengths-based and trauma informed perspective.
- Facilitate discussions around history, culture, spirituality, etc.
- Support CSEY in identifying positive role models.
- Address issues in a manner that is deep and meaningful to CSEY.
- Connect CSEY with prosocial activities, volunteerism, and activism opportunities. Build connections with youth development organizations to facilitate smooth referrals.
- Practice patience—CSEY can be resistant to services, mistrustful of providers, and slow to engage.
- Tolerate ambiguity—CSEY will most likely vacillate regarding their decision to be in the life. The reasons they stay are often the reasons to leave. Therapists must be able to sit with this contradiction.
- Problem solve barriers to prosocial activities. Are CSEY lacking confidence in interacting with peers? Are they accustomed to peer conflict? Do they have a history of bullying? Do they lack time or motivation to engage?
School Protocols

- School site level
- District level
A Sample Protocol for School Districts

SITUATION AND PROTOCOL

**Suspected Recruitment or Actual Exploitation by Student**

- **STEP 1**: Involve on-site school resource officer (SRO) for possible investigation
- **STEP 2**: Investigate possible campus impacts, such as recruitment, harassment, and involvement of other students, and safety issues on campus
- **STEP 3**: Provide school consequence, if appropriate, and law enforcement may make an arrest depending on outcome of investigation
- **STEP 4**: SRO to input relevant information into the Law Enforcement Human Trafficking website if sufficient and/or reliable evidence exists

**Suspected Victim of Commercial Sexual Exploitation of Children**

- **STEP 1**: Involve on-site school resource officer (SRO) for possible investigation
- **STEP 2**: If child abuse or neglect is suspected, submit Child Welfare Services report with as much detail as possible
- **STEP 3**: Investigate possible campus impacts, such as recruitment, harassment, and involvement of other students, and safety issues on campus
- **STEP 4**: If appropriate, and in consultation with the victim, contact and inform guardian or parent of potential victimization
- **STEP 5**: Offer potential victim and/or parent/guardian a referral to appropriate counseling or social services
- **STEP 6**: Set up regular contact with victim and periodically check on status (Most appropriate for counselor or social worker)

**Confirmed Victim of Commercial Sexual Exploitation of Children**

- **STEP 1**: Involve on-site school resource officer (SRO) for possible investigation
- **STEP 2**: Submit Child Welfare Services report with as much detail as possible
- **STEP 3**: Investigate possible campus impacts, such as recruitment, harassment, and involvement of other students, and safety issues on campus
- **STEP 4**: SRO to conduct investigation or refer to appropriate investigation unit
- **STEP 5**: If appropriate, and in consultation with victim, contact and inform parent/guardian of victimization
- **STEP 6**: Investigate whether the school placement is appropriate for the student; if not, work with the appropriate department to transfer the student
- **STEP 7**: Offer victim a referral to appropriate counseling or social services; set up regular contact with victim and periodically check on status

School Protocols: Mandated Reporting

- As mandated reporters, you must report suspected child abuse or neglect (Pen. Code § 11166.)
- Sexual abuse includes “sexual exploitation” and “commercial sexual exploitation” (Pen. Code § 11165.1(c)&(d).)
Resources

- Find Support in Your Local Community
  - Community Violence Solutions: https://cvsolutions.org/
  - OAG Getting Help for Victims: https://oag.ca.gov/human-trafficking/help

- National Organizations
  - Polaris Project: https://polarisproject.org/

- Fact Sheets/Basic Overviews
  - Department of Education, Human Trafficking in America’s Schools, January 2015: https://safesupportivelearning.ed.gov/sites/default/files/HumanTraffickinginAmericasSchools.pdf
  - Administration for Children & Families, California: Efforts to Combat Human Trafficking: https://www.acf.hhs.gov/sites/default/files/otip/california_profile_efforts_toCombat_humann_trafficking.pdf
Questions and Answers
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